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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; COLOMBIAN HOSTAGE RELEASE OPERATION; THE
NEW ARGENTINE ADMINISTRATION AND THE US-ARGENTINE DISPUTE; 01/02/08

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's international opinion pieces cover implications of the failed Colombian hostage release operation; and expectations over the new Argentine administration's handling of long-term strategies as well as its "dispute" with the US.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "Caution was missing"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" front-pages an opinion piece by prestigious political columnist Joaquin Morales Sola, who writes (01/02) "Hugo Chavez interfered with histrionics in the strategy of Latin America's most experienced and dexterous guerrilla movement. This explains the outcome of his mediation. Nestor Kirchner followed the steps of his old Venezuelan ally without measuring the political and institutional risks both he and his country could run. Every humanitarian effort to solve the problems of people without any rights whatsoever is necessary and urgent, although it calls for an indispensable amount of caution. Without such moderation, one runs the risk of not solving pre-existent human rights problems and... could get trapped in the Colombian guerrillas cruel shrewdness.

"What did Argentina's lack of caution consist of? First and foremost, Argentina did not bear in mind who made up the committee of guarantors of an alleged hostage release, which never occurred. An Argentine former president and current FM Jorge Taiana were part of a committee that was composed only by ambassadors to Colombia, except for Brazil...

"... Kirchner should have permanently double checked the information Chavez provided him with that from Colombian President Uribe because the latter has long experience in dealing with the FARC. Just when Cristina Kirchner called Uribe..., he may have warned her that even though he supported the operation, he was skeptical about the FARC's good will...

"Kirchner is fine to care about human rights, but he might as well start out with the case of Hilda Molina, th grandmother the Castro regime bars from traveling to Argentina to see her family."

- "Traces of a never ending story"

Marcelo Cantelmi, international editor of leading "Clarín," writes (01/02) "It is not easy to understand what is really at stake behind the scenes of the (for the time being) failed operation.

"... Neither Washington nor Bogota wanted the FARC hostage rescue operation to have a happy ending, because it could have allowed Chavez to have a political way out after his election defeat and improve his international image while creating an independent

diplomatic choice in a region that is missing from the White House's current agenda...

"President Uribe stormed onto the scene Monday after talking to President Bush over the phone. This might be just a coincidence, but no details about that conversation were made available."

- "The year ahead"

Liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald" editorializes (01/02) "There seems every reason to expect a Happy New Year for Argentina and its brand-new president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner. A presidential inauguration date of December 10 means that the start of her first full year should find her in the middle of her political honeymoon... And yet after only three weeks of presidency the honeymoon is already a distant memory - she has had to deal with the gauntlet flung down by CGT trade unions boss Hugo Moyano and the self-inflicted wounds of disputes with the US and Uruguay...

"... In the short term she should be concerned over the dispute with the US on international and domestic grounds alike. Antagonizing the world's superpower is never a good idea but the continuing repercussions of Guido Antonini Wilson's suitcase also provide a worrying domestic political signal that the mid-2007 rash of scandals was not simply an election year phenomenon...

"Yet corruption seems more a priority for the media than public opinion at large. In a slightly longer term... she should be worried by Moyano's threats because they cannot be considered empty while inflation remains an unresolved (and indeed unrecognized) problem...

"If the tale of 2007 was constant slippage four outgoing President Nestor Kirchner culminating in a successful transfer of power, a

totally dominant new president needs to avoid any reverse sequence. The best way of ensuring that is to treat 2008 as exactly what it is - a year in which the election lies in the past instead of looming towards the end of the year, as in 2007 - embarking on long-term strategies to prepare Argentina for the many changes of the 21st century."

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